

Drug Problems in the Nordic Countries

DENMARK

Denmark has both drug abuse and trafficking problems--and likely the most serious problems of the Nordic countries. Abuse is acknowledged as a problem, but treated as a psycho-social maladjustment problem. Cannabis (hashish and marijuana) use is widespread and generally tolerated. In fact, cannabis can be grown in small amounts legally--though technically only for ornamental purposes. Continuing media coverage and increasing public awareness are, however, causing officials to consider outlawing cannabis cultivation. A guestimate would put the number of heroin abusers somewhere between .1 and .2 percent of the population--mostly adults in Copenhagen. Cocaine is viewed more as a potential problem, and attributed to affluent young urbanites.

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Drug trafficking has most Danes seriously concerned and there is an emerging consensus that penalties for hard drug trafficking should be increased. Denmark is a transit country for drugs destined for other Nordic countries largely because entry requirements are minimal and frequently not enforced. Most of the heroin comes from SEA and most of the cannabis comes from Pakistan, Lebanon, and Morocco. Most of those arrested for drug trafficking are Danish, but other traffickers include Turks, Pakistanis, ethnic Chinese, Yugoslavians, Algerians, and Brazilians, and about 10 percent of those arrested are considered major dealers. There are significant Pakistani and Singapore Chinese expatriate communities in Denmark. Kastrup Airport provides worldwide connections for commercial aircraft and airfreight and seaports allow for containerized cargo shipments. Traffickers have also used private vehicles and trains to smuggle drugs into Denmark.

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Denmark has made some effort to contain its drug problems. The drug law was changed in 1982 to allow for prosecution of those profiting from drug trafficking even if they were not directly involved, a police officer is assigned to Peru, and there is a national drug intelligence unit within the national police force. In 1983, it was estimated that there were about 300 police officers working narcotics.

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The US Embassy also reports that courts have been handing out stiffer sentences. Nonetheless, the existence of the alternative community in Christiania where drug abuse and trafficking are acknowledged has not been resolved and presents a problem for other Nordic countries--who blame their problems on Denmark.

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A recent incident-- In December 1985, Denmark dropped a demand for extradition from Cyprus of a Lebanese national wanted as a major suspect in a drug case because its diplomats in Beirut received death threats. Erik Ninn-Hansen, Minister of Justice said "We decided that the lives of our diplomats were more important than bringing a major drug trafficker to justice."

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SWEDEN

Sweden has a drug abuse problem. A questimate would put the total number of drug users at about .2 percent of the population--primarily youths, but increasingly adults. Cannabis is the major problem and neither its cultivation nor its use is a criminal offense. Cultivation is not even illegal. The Board of Education in 1984, estimated that 5 percent of all high school graduates had used drugs at least once. There are about 3000 heroin addicts, according to 1984 estimates, and although there are no estimates of the number of cocaine users, Swedes are most afraid of cocaine abuse. Amphetamine abuse is an especially Swedish phenomenon.

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The public views drug abuse as one of the most serious problems facing Sweden and the media has a strong anti-drug campaign including regular articles and editorials. The police, parents groups, and opposition parties want drug use criminalized and petitioned parliament to do so in 1984 with 434,000 signatures (5 percent of the population). The government opposes criminalization, however. Possession and trafficking are criminal offenses and a 1984 law made sentences--rather than fines--mandatory. The 1984 law also expanded enforcement and treatment programs. A 1983 law made it illegal to plan or facilitate trafficking.

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Despite Swedish laxity regarding use, Sweden's enforcement program is fairly solid. Heroin and cocaine seizure figures are low by our standards, but cannabis and amphetamines are the drugs more commonly consumed. The national police board has a narcotics force of 523 and the Stockholm police force has a drug unit of 65. Customs has 27 dogs and 180 of the border control staff are specially trained for narcotics interdiction. The coast guard also has 500 specially trained. Sweden has police liaison with the Netherlands, Thailand, Greece, and Interpol (Paris) and customs liaison with Denmark, West Germany, and the UK, as well as customs agreements with the Netherlands and France. Sweden participates in the Pompidou Group and the Nordic Council--both organizations which are pursuing antinarcotics and customs cooperation. In 1984, Sweden signed an extradition treaty with the US.

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FINLAND

Finland has an abuse problem. It is a relatively small problem when compared to other Nordic and West European problems, however. A questimate would put the number of all drug abusers at less than .1 percent of the population. Hashish is the drug most available and widely abused--about 90 percent of all seizures are hashish. Finns believe the problem is less of a problem today than it was 10-15 years ago, but they also acknowledge that it has increased slightly in the past few years. It definitely is viewed as less of a problem than alcohol abuse, however. While it is primarily an urban problem--with 40-45 percent of all drug abusers in Helsinki, it is registered across all social groups. It might be a little more pronounced among the higher more socially mobile groups aged 19-40. [REDACTED]

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The media follows drug arrests and seizures in detail and the general public believes they must guard against the problem spreading. There is little evidence that enforcement efforts are changing. The Helsinki police has a drug unit of 65 and there are about 35 other officers who also work on narcotics cases. In March 1985, police seized an illegal heroin lab in a rural area in central Finland, confiscated 450 grams of refined morphine, and found about 1000 poppy plants under cultivation. Only one individual was arrested, however. It is recognized that most of the drugs enter via Denmark (about 65 percent) with the rest coming in from Sweden, the Netherlands, or Spain, and to a lesser extent, India, Cyprus, or the UK, yet no bilaterals have been initiated. Most of those arrested on narcotics charges are Finns and it is believed that Finnish guestworkers residing elsewhere in Europe or organized rings of skilled and semi-skilled white and blue collar workers in Finland are importing the drugs. It is also believed that the users are the traffickers. Nevertheless, possession is generally treated less severe than trafficking (trafficking penalties are 2-10 years). [REDACTED]

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NORWAY

Norway's problem is one of abuse--drugs are trafficked into Norway but rarely transit the country destined for other countries. Heroin use is a problem, although cannabis use is more common. Generally, there is social acceptance among the youth regarding cannabis. [redacted] there may be as many as 4,000 heroin addicts and 35,000 cannabis users. Cannabis use has risen, as has the popularity and use of amphetamines. Drug abuse is largely still an urban problem. Norwegian authorities currently fear a rise in cocaine abuse although use is still minimal. There is a problem with enforcement primarily because the courts are somewhat lenient with users. [redacted]

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Norwegian authorities are particularly concerned about the potential for increased trafficking and abuse. The Norwegian government follows a strict policy of legal control over licit and illicit drugs, without distinguishing between hard and soft drugs. The severest penalties in the penal code for any crime are imposed on traffickers. Cooperation among agencies is reported to be good, as is specialized narcotics training. There are about 250 police officers assigned to narcotics control. Although the position of Special Narcotics Adviser was transferred from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry of Social Welfare in January 1985, [redacted] this was not a shift in emphasis from law enforcement to social amelioration, but rather an acknowledgement of the successes of enforcement. [redacted]

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Norway believes that drugs are an international problem and must be dealt with accordingly. The authorities are active in the Pompidou Group and work closely with the other Nordic countries, the Netherlands and West Germany, and have narcotics attaches in London and Islamabad. The Minister of Justice has emphasized the need for equivalence of narcotics statutes and increased uniformity in enforcement among the European countries. [redacted]

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[redacted] The Norwegians are particularly interested in improving their ability to interdict drugs, reduce demand, and treat abuse cases. Rehabilitation and treatment centers are increasing. They also support initiatives for tracing financial assets of traffickers and confiscating their proceeds. Norway has tied their economic aid to Thailand to eradication efforts. [redacted]

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